

Elizabeth D. Samet

Grant in Mexico
for Tony Hartle

To educated Henry Adams
he was proof
of devolution,
to Melville a cigar,
smoking always and alone,
on a ridge
in Tennessee.
But how visible
four years ago
to the eyes of that coyote—
coyote poised,
so Buber tells us,
between the spirit's venture
and vegetable security—
coyote pushing further south,
too far from the Catskills,
unhappy in the Bronx, arriving
on the Heights between
the Doric columns
of a shabby mausoleum cicatrized
by garbage trucks
and spray paint fusillades?

Unquiet,
in that tomb
as he had been
in Mexico,
the war of politics

he so mistrusted.
By then, of course,
Point Pleasant
had receded,
West Point too,
where,
unapologetic
and unbidden,
he read novels—
all of Marryat and Cooper,
excelled in nothing
save for math
and horsemanship,
indulged the playful
premonition he would,
one day,
be a general.

In Mexico
he studied generals:
Scott with saber, aiguillettes,
Taylor nonchalant,
seated sideways
on his horse.

At Palo Alto
he watched a cannon ball
tear off Page's jaw.
At Monterrey he crouched—
his horse on loan
to a dead man—
in a field of cane beneath
the Black Fort's batteries;
and two days later,
September 23rd,
(almost to the plaza,
but low on ammunition)
he volunteered
to ride unfriendly streets

(the horse his shield)
 one boot hooked
 around the cantle,
 as he said,
 one arm
 about the neck,
 exposed.

Later,
 with a troop of voltigeurs,
 he would tote the pieces
 of a mountain howitzer
 along San Cosme road;
 still dripping from the ditch
 that lay between
 them and the church,
 he would knock
 hard upon the door,
 persuade the priest
 of what he ought to do
 in Spanish
 (broken Spanish),
 till shells dropped from the belfry.

Veracruz,
 Churubusco,
 Cerro Gordo and Chapultepec.
 Allied with those who
 would oppose him:
 with Pemberton and Lee,
 with Buckner,
 most uneasy
 most steadfast,
 his banker and his
 friend who, in the end,
 would come again
 to Mount McGregor.
 On furlough in the spring
 of '48-that surreal

climbing party
of incipient
Confederates,
up volcanic Popocatepetl,
through the caves
of Cuernavaca.
Grant adding
even then (as he wrote)
to his book and to his coffin.

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